

The Croton Society  
NEWSLETTER  
P. O. Box 5597  
Sun City Center, FL 33571

February 2000  
Volume 2, Issue 1

**NEWS FLASH NEWS FLASH**

Mark your calendars!  
The next Croton Society meeting will be Saturday, March 18<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 p.m. at U.S.F Botanical Gardens Pavilion. Please plan to attend, as this will be the first business meeting of the year.

PLEASE COMPLETE & RETURN the enclosed "Opportunity to Serve" form which will indicate your interest in serving on Society committees.

We will **PUBLISH YOUR ARTICLES!** Please share your experiences, expertise, advice, tips, etc. with your fellow enthusiasts. Send them to the NEWSLETTER address below.

Please Note: The Post Office Box used for purposes of gathering information for the Newsletter is the personal property of the Editors. We apologize if the use of this address has confused anyone.

*Rick & Julie Blauman, Editors*

The official newsletter of The Croton Society

# Codiaeum Connection

## New officers usher in New Year

The new officers have been elected and will begin their duties with a Society meeting to be held on the 18<sup>th</sup> of this month at the University of South Florida Botanical Gardens. We hope everyone will attend to help plan a year's worth of meetings, educational programs, plant distributions and goals for the upcoming year.

**Ron Parlett** (Tampa, FL) has again been chosen as the leader for the Society.

**Bill Carr**, our former Society Secretary has been elected as the Vice President. Bill lives in Plant City, FL

**Connie Hoerstgen** (Tampa, FL) has been selected as the club's Treasurer.

**Julie Blauman** (Ruskin, FL) co-edits this newsletter and will serve as the Society's Secretary this year.

## Crotons on the Internet

by: *Tom Broome, Polk City, FL*

A "Croton List" for the Society has been established, where people can join and talk about Crotons on-line.

As with other lists, you subscribe with an e-mail address and member of the Society is not required to join. Questions, comments, and opinions are submitted and every list member has a chance to respond.

To subscribe, use this address:  
[crotonsociety-subscribe@onelist.com](mailto:crotonsociety-subscribe@onelist.com)

If you don't want to be burdened with e-mails, there are a couple of options so that you can either get all the posts or just look at a list of the posts of the day. There are not enough members yet so that the e-mails are not overwhelming.

The list is for people who want to talk about any subject related to Crotons and can be a very easy way for members who are not centrally located to keep up with the "hot topics" amongst the members and events of the Society.

There is an area where photographs can be shared and there are already a few nice ones on file. This is also a forum where people can exchange plants, ideas, tips, etc. if they want to keep things on an informal basis.

The list will not carry price lists or commercial forms of advertising, as it is intended for the non-commercial audience. Currently there are members from all over the world, and this is an excellent way to discuss growing habits, varieties, etc. with them.

As the moderator of the list, please feel to contact me with any questions you may have. I can be reached at [cycadjungl@aol.com](mailto:cycadjungl@aol.com) and look forward to meeting you all on-line.

## Celebrating the Holidays with the Croton Society

The Croton Society celebrated its first holiday season with an outing to the Salt

Rock Grille in Indian Rocks Beach (just north of Clearwater, FL).

About a dozen members gathered to join in the festivities. The restaurant boasted a superb art collection and overlooked a waterway, which added to its rustic charm. Entrees varied from pasta primavera to prime rib to fish. Everyone enjoyed their meals and ate entirely too much (isn't that a requirement during the holiday season?).

After our delicious dinners, we adjourned outside where we held the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Croton Society Gift exchange. Members brought Crotons ranging from 6" to 3-gallon pots and included such beauties as Elaine, Andreanum, AFD5, Oviofolium and others, both identified and not. The plants were numbered and everyone selected a number out of a "hat". Afterwards, there was opportunity to swap, but no one opted to do so. Everyone was delighted with his or her holiday gift.

Many thanks to Ron Parlett for organizing the event. We look forward to sharing this tradition with many more of you next year.

## Retail Chains – One Collector's Search for Croton Varieties

by: Rick Blauman, Ruskin FL

In a world inundated with a seemingly endless supply of Petras and Mameys, a little searching through the retail chains will reveal that there are two or three dozen other varieties available. While you won't run across rare Crotons at a chain store, you can still add variety and bold colors to your collection at a low cost. For those who plant their crotons in the ground, these are ideal for exposed areas where freeze damage is possible.

Sometimes there will be an odd hybrid mixed in with the Petras or even a shipment of *something* altogether new.

Learn to scrutinize each specimen for color and leaf shape. Sometimes, searching through the Petras will reveal a plant in the back with oak leaves, maybe the only one in the group. You could also find an interesting sport or an especially good color variant of a common variety.

Take, for example, an unlabeled plant, which had been shaded out under a mound of Dracenas and Dffenbachias at Home Depot. It was assumed to be a Croton, only due to the fact that some of the leaves had one or two small yellow spots on them. Altogether a sorry-looking plant by any standards that was 99% green. After being planted it where it could get some sun, it turned into a Yellow Mrs. Iceton. The moral of the story is that you have to look for subtleties and some things may not be showing their full potential. They won't always jump out at you.

With the low-pay and high turnover that characterizes big stores, it is unlikely that you can get anyone on the phone that knows what a Croton is, let alone be able to tell them apart. Since visits to these markets are almost unavoidable, get in the habit of checking through the garden center whenever you are there.

For some reason major chains will usually have their Crotons in several places throughout the department. I have seen stores that have them in half a dozen places. Not only are they usually not labeled as to variety, they may not even be labeled as Crotons. They can be in a group of "house plants" or "foliage plants."

From time to time any given store may get in shipments of unusual Crotons, particularly in the fall and winter, when wholesale growers are clearing out their greenhouses for the next spring's plants. A good sign is when a store carries a selection of gingers, Heliconias, and Cordylines, as they are more likely to experiment with various Crotons.

Last autumn the south Tampa Home Depot got in several batches of Bravo in one gallon pots, possibly 100 in total. These were large, full plants and well

colored, some mostly red, with others mostly yellow or pink. These sold out quickly. People really do want something a little different. Expect to pay about \$3.00 for a one-gallon and anywhere from \$5.00 to \$8.00 for a three-gallon pot. Don't hesitate to ask the manager if they can order additional varieties, all they can do is say "no."

If the following stores are nearby, it may be worth getting in the habit of checking these chains regularly:

**Home Depot** – Probably the best of the major chains. In several stores throughout the Tampa Bay area, I have found several three gallon pots of Mrs. Iceton (unlabeled as Crotons), and one gallon pots of Stoptlight, Banana, Red Banana, Maculatum, Andreanum, Elaine, Bravo, Yellow Petra, Yellow Mamey, and several others. The Fort Myers store also had one gallon Multicolors. No one location will carry all of these, nor will they have them in stock on a continual basis. They also carry Angel Plants (see below). This makes about 20 varieties and six leaf shapes from one chain. It takes repeat visits to several stores to get them all. These will make a nice landscape bed by themselves or when supplemented with more unusual kinds.

**Lowes** – Occasionally they will get in something different. I have found large three gallon Eburneum and Green and Gold at the Brandon location as a one time promo. On another occasion I found a Tortillis-type and a Norma.

**Target** – These can vary, and those with larger gardening departments will have a better assortment, occasionally with one gallon Punctatum, Maculatum, AFD #5, Elaine, Yellow Mamey, Banana, and several that resemble soft-leaved Joanna Coppinger-types with varying amounts of spots and stripes.

**Walmart** – Some of the Walmarts are expanding their nurseries, which gives them more floor space for Crotons. Elaine and Banana can often be found.

**Kmart** – Some of the K-Marts have lacked imagination in their Crotons, but at a Tampa store I did find several 3-

gallon Excellent and what appears to be a very good red Andream-type mixed in with the Petras. It pays to check.

**Frank's** – In their outdoor sections, I have found Franklin Roosevelt and a Tortillis-type. Indoors there will be several other varieties, but these are in small pots, low light and air conditioning, which need an acclimation period to grow outdoors.

**Scotty's** – Once in a while they will have something like Banana in a three gallon pot, but the prices tend to be on the high side. Unlike other chains, they don't seem to have full-time nursery staff & this may effect their selection.

### Angel Plants

Home Depot, Franks, and some of the other chains carry Angel Plants. The prices are high relative to the pot sizes. They do have small quantities of Crotons, which are mostly Petra and Mamey (as if there weren't enough in the world). However, I have found Mrs. Icton, Yellow Mrs. Icton, Florida Selecta, Victoria Gold Bell, Bush on Fire, Gold Star, Lauren's Rainbow, Norma, and Eburneum (called "Andrew"). Typically several of these are mixed in with a large assortment of houseplants.

I urge all members to share information on retail sources with the club, whether chain or independent. We will periodically update and print lists of Croton sources. If we patronize these stores, they will gradually carry more varieties, as they perceive the demand for them. As a result, more people will see the tremendous diversity of Croton colors and shapes in nurseries and lawns across the state. The plants themselves are our best advertising.

## Message from the President

*by: Dr. Ron Parlett*

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who elected me as President of the Croton Society for another year. I can not tell you how proud I am that the Croton Society has

grown and prospered to the point it has. This is of course due to the hard work of many.

The Society started out with 12 eager croton lovers on a cool January 1999 day. We put together a sketchy set of by-laws to govern a small, but energetic group. We have outgrown our by-laws and the way we need to conduct the mission of the Croton Society.

Last year, many decisions were made and carried out to benefit the society and much of the work was done by just a handful. Since we have grown to over 50 members strong, it is time to tap into the strengths and skills of the membership. It does not matter where the members live; through the use of telephones, e-mail, U. S. Post Office and in person meetings, committee chairpersons can communicate with other committee members. I will be appointing various committee chairpersons. In this newsletter, you will find an "Opportunity to Serve" form. Please look over this form and select an area or areas that interest you. The committee chair will contact you for your valuable input. Please return these forms to me ASAP. This is your opportunity to participate even from afar. It will be the responsibility of the chair to bring forward recommendations to the meetings for the membership to approve. I look forward to working closely with all committees.

I hope you enjoyed the Croton Calendar, many thanks go to Harold Lee for his leadership in getting this calendar together and to Phil Stager for all his efforts.

I would like to take this opportunity to report to you that the Croton Society participated in the Florida State Fair. We had an exhibit with at least 35 varieties on display. Membership information was available. Fair officials were to pay the Society at least \$100 for our participation.

I am excited about the future of the Croton Society. Together we can make a difference.

## Crotons from Cuttings

*by: Rick and Julie Blauman*

### The Need for Variety

In prior years, hundreds of Croton varieties were sold in small quantities to gardeners across Florida. Today the situation has changed and several varieties now dominate the nurseries. Most of the older varieties are rarely, if ever, available as potted specimens. Fortunately it is still possible to acquire many rare Crotons for a nominal cost. Propagation of these is vital to the hobby, as some varieties can easily be lost to cultivation. Over the years, hurricanes, floods, fires, and other natural forces have wiped out precious specimens, along with individuals who purchase older homes and tear out the existing landscaping without appreciation for what they are destroying. Entire collections have been lost this way.

Because of their genetic instability, Crotons are primarily reproduced asexually. Air layering is the preferred method, as the new stem is allowed to root prior to being removed. However, in the course of collecting new plants, it is often impractical to air layer. Cuttings best reproduce a large specimen in a stranger's yard across town.

As new enthusiasts, we have developed a method for collecting cuttings so that we can acquire a large collection of diverse material. These are by no means the "rules for the road" but are just our method that we would like to share for the upcoming spring growing season and prime cutting collection time.

### Road Trip

Prior to departing on a Croton cutting expedition, certain equipment is recommended. While all of these are not necessarily essential, they will make things much easier. When we joined the Society, we were told by some of the more experienced collectors that we needed some of these items, but without

much instruction. Let our mistakes be your lessons.

We now keep these items together in the trunk of our car, in a bag or kit for unexpected opportunities.

- Pruners** (a pair for each person)
- Paper Towels** (Bounty Select-a-Size are the perfect size!)
- Water Bottle** (full)
- Plastic Freezer Bags**
- Aluminum Foil** (Reynolds precut sheets save you time!)
- Rubber Bands**
- Garbage Bags**
- Cooler**
- Marking Tape**
- Notepad & Pen**
- Paring knife**
- Surgical/rubber gloves**

Keep several paper towels at a time "soaking" in a zippered freezer bag filled with just enough water to dampen the paper, but not leak all over your collection kit.

With a little practice, one develops an eye for spotting Crotons from a moving car. It is often difficult, if not impossible, to identify the variety without parking and taking a closer look. Old homes often have large shrubs around the foundation of which, a certain percentage are Crotons. Look for tall, full bushes that offer many good cuttings. Of course, you can't, in good conscience, ask for a piece of a Croton that has only two scrawny-looking stems to it.

While driving to and from work or during lunch, get in the habit of driving down different streets each time you get the chance. There may be a beautiful, large Croton just a block away from the main drag.

In order to preserve a good reputation for all Croton collectors, it is highly recommended (and encouraged by the Society) that permission from the owner be granted prior to clipping. This is only exhibits good manners! Compliment them on their plants and explain that you belong to a club that collects these. Also, explaining that you are trying to preserve these beautiful

plants for future generations and for educational purposes will impress upon the owner that you are not just a drive-by clipper. They are more likely to oblige your request if they feel you are genuinely interested in what they have.

Sometimes you will get the entire story of their yard and their neighborhood, or be asked to identify some flower or tree in the back yard (obviously plant collectors know *everything* about every plant). Once conversation is initiated and approval granted, take cuttings from the lower section of the plant(s).

There are at least two reasons we can think of for this. First is that these cuttings typically root faster. Secondly, it is fairly inconspicuous. You are less likely to horrify the owner if you don't take the choicest top branch, which also increases your odds for more cutting opportunities. If the owner plans on removing the Croton entirely, the by all means cut it down to the stump for them. Surplus cuttings can always be distributed. Several members have related such stories to us.

#### Between Stops

We prefer the team approach, where one takes cuttings and drives, while the other preps. This is an efficient use of time, as you can cover more distance. As you look for your next stop, the cuttings can be prepared:

- **Promptly wrap** the cut end of the stems in wet paper towels (the ones soaking in the zippered freezer bag) to prevent wilting. These will not stay in place without aluminum foil (pre-cut sheets work best and are most time efficient) wrapped tightly around them. It is essential that they not be allowed to dry out.
- **Remove lower leaves** because the rootless plant cannot support a full crown. Cut them off with the pruner or your small paring knife so you don't wind up with black Croton stains all over your fingers. (Oh yes, by the way – you should wear old clothes and potentially may want to cover your automobile seats, as Croton stains don't come out!)

- **Remove flowers**, as they will sap the plant's vigor.
- **Bundle cuttings** from the same plant with a rubber band, as this will simplify potting later. If the paper towels and foil are placed over the rubber band, they can be easily removed later for soaking the stems.
- **Use marking tape to identify.** Leaves can vary widely depending on which part of the plant they grew on, and make identification time-consuming if not bundled.
- **Once bundled**, cuttings can be stood in a cooler, laid on the back seat on an old towel or in your trunk.
- **Always keep the stems moist.** If they dry out at any point they will wilt.

#### Trimming

Once home, remove the paper towel and aluminum foil. If you cannot immediately plant them, soak the cuttings in buckets of water. After a day or more of soaking, the cuttings may be potted. A partially shaded porch is a good spot for keeping the buckets. Most homes are too dark indoors, although they can be kept in bottles on windowsills. (We use glass bottles for small pieces which may have gotten broken off in transit.)

Prior to potting, trim off the bark on the bottom couple of inches of each stem. This will allow for greater water intake and speed up rooting. A sharp paring knife will take off the bark in thin strips; be sure to remove the green layer underneath to expose the white surface. (We use \$1 paring knives purchased from the Pampered Chef. They are sharp and cheap!) The buckets can be carried inside and this process can be done on newspapers in the comfort of your house. Turn on the TV or put some music on and enjoy yourself. Occasionally you will run across some with limp new growth; remove these leaves, as leaves should be firm and upright.

Some thoughts on getting the cuttings ready to pot: You may have stems that are too long to pot, particularly if it is a single stem. These tend to be top heavy

and rotate in the pot when watered, causing damage to new roots. It is best to cut these down to 12" to 18". Bare stems (or sticks) are quite capable of rooting and leafing (*warning*, don't get them upside down). You can plant these in with a leaf-bearing stem of the same plant. A forked branch, with 2 or 3 stems is ideal as it will be steady in a pot and give a full look.

After removing the leaves, lower bark and trimming lengthy stems, re-bundle each group with rubber bands. Change the water in the buckets and place the trimmed stems back in.

### Potting

You'll need a light substrate that is heavy in Canadian peat to promote the best root development. Some collectors mix in sand and mulch to enhance draining. Those without misting beds will have a hard enough time keeping things moist and may want to use pure peat. Trial and error will be your best determining factor.

NOTE: Canadian peat is packed dry and must be thoroughly soaked to completely wet it. It will repel water and you will need to alternate between busting up the clumps and adding water. This is sloppy work and you need to wear casual clothes, *very* casual. Most stems should be suitable for one-gallon pots, figuring on two or three stems per pot, or one forked stem. Larger pieces require a two or three gallon pot. If you are generous with this, you will have good-looking plants from the beginning. Those who try to get too many pots from a cutting will have to wait a couple of years to have a nice plant. If you are planning on selling or trading the rooted cuttings, it is best to make them big and full from the start.

We have found that there are some Croton varieties that tend to be "wilts." These are often narrow-leaved types, such as Rex and Franklin Roosevelt. If not pampered throughout the entire process, their leaves may droop and even fall off. Others are fairly tough and seem to stay erect under normal conditions and these are

frequently varieties with thick, large leaves like Andreanum, Irene Kingsley and Davis Hybrids.

By promoting a policy of actively reproducing Crotons, members of the Society can get cuttings from varieties that are not found in any nursery. For example, there are unique varieties carried by Reasoner's nursery of Bradenton at the turn of the last century, that have been scattered in thousands of yards across the state. Anywhere from coastal Central Florida southwards is prime territory. Old neighborhoods are waiting to be explored. Why not get some friends together and make an afternoon of it?

If you do, please share your experiences or expertise. Most of all, have fun and enjoy exploring!

PLEASE NOTE: The Croton Society urges you to seek permission prior to obtaining cuttings, keeping in mind that there are certain hybridizers who do not want any of their Crotons in the trade unless they personally release them. Please be respectful of their wishes and promote a positive image of the Croton Society.

## Croton Society Memberships

At the Christmas meeting, it was decided that Croton Society memberships would be one per family since only one newsletter and calendar go to each address. Hence, if your membership is set to expire, please send your \$12 payment to the Croton Society Membership Committee, P. O. Box 24892, Tampa, FL 33623. If you would feel better paying for each person, you may contribute the additional \$12 as a gift to the Society. Welcome spouses!

## Working for Edison never dull

Reprinted with permission from *The News-Press*, Fort Myers, FL

*by: Maureen Bashaw, Contributing Writer*  
When he talks about his hero, a light penetrates Robert Halgrim's faded old eyes, his mouth widens and opens into a gummy smile and his fingers tap on the red blanket covering his frail body.

Halgrim, 94, was a boy, barely in his teens, when he first met the great inventor Thomas Alva Edison.

Besides selling real estate, Halgrim's father owned the Court Theatre in Patio de Leon.

Young Halgrim's job was to take tickets and escort people to their seats in the movie house.

Thomas Edison was a frequent moviegoer.

"Every time we changed the picture show, Mr. Edison got together a party of about 25 people and came for the opening," Halgrim said. "He always wanted to sit in the front row."

A few years later, when Halgrim was a sophomore at Fort Myers High School, he was invited to Seminole Lodge, the name Edison and his wife, Mina, called what is now known as the Edison home. The Edisons wanted someone to teach their grandchildren who were visiting how to hunt, fish and sail. Halgrim's Boy Scout master recommended the teen-ager for the job. After the children left, Halgrim continued to visit the lodge and helped Edison in the laboratory and in the gardens.

So began a friendship that lasted until Edison died in 1931.

A story on Edison in (December 1999's) issue of the *Smithsonian*, features Halgrim. With his usual good humor, the Fort Myers resident, who lives near the Edison Estate, warns readers: "The good Lord keeps me alive to tell lies!"

When asked whether he's going to tell lies for this story, he just grins.

Then, he gets serious. As the sun begins to set, he sits in a chaise lounge in his

old brick and concrete block house and talks of the old days. From the window of the room, visitors can see some of Halgrim's favorite plants – brightly colored Crotons, many grown from cuttings of Edison Estate crotons.

"Mr. Edison was the most wonderful, generous man. He gave me the chance to go to Cornell (University) and study Horticulture." During summer breaks, Halgrim worked in the laboratory and the gardens, all the time learning from the inventor.

Edison, though, liked to be in control. He was paying for young Halgrim's education, so he called the shots.

Two years into Halgrim's studies at Cornell, he sent word that he wanted the student to come home. The inventor was developing a formula for synthetic rubber and wanted Halgrim to work with him on the project.

"If you haven't learned everything, you need to know at the university by now, you need to quit anyway," Edison said. "I'll finish educating you myself." And he did. Halgrim ended up working for the inventor until Edison's death.

Halgrim describes Edison as a fair, but demanding boss. The inventor didn't have time for light conversation and didn't expect his employees to spend time chatting unnecessarily. What he did expect was that they work long hours.

"I worked from about 7 in the morning until whenever the job was done," says Halgrim. "Sometimes he'd keep you up all night. Time meant nothing to him. Neither did money. I worked for 10 years for \$85 a week. After 10 years, I had to ask Mrs. Edison if she'd see about getting me a raise."

However, Halgrim never thought about leaving. Working for Edison, he says, was "hard, but never dull."

Over the years, the Edisons introduced Halgrim to some of the most famous people of the century, including Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, Charles

Lindbergh, John Burroughs, botanists and movie stars.

Halgrim smiles remembering the movie stars.

"There was Mary Pickford. She was the sweetheart of America you know... And there was Douglas Fairbanks. He was such a good actor. Mr. Edison loved all the movie stars."

After Edison's death, Halgrim went to work for the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers taking part in the building of water projects around Florida, but he kept in touch with Mina Edison.

Before she died in 1947, she deeded the Edison Estate over to the city of Fort Myers with the stipulation that Halgrim be the curator. For 23 years, Halgrim was the curator of the Estate.

"My dad's whole life revolved around the Edison Home," says his son Robert Halgrim of Alva, who took over the job of curator of the Estate after his father retired and stayed for 25 years.

"He never got over knowing and working for Thomas Edison. He placed the Edison Home and the Edisons right up there with his family," says his son. The elder Halgrim's wife, Mary, died in 1995.

Another son, Tom Halgrim, principal at Allen Park Elementary School, says his father is still the happiest when he's visiting the Edison Estate.

Good friend and live-in companion Bob Alonzo takes the older Halgrim – in his wheelchair – on visits to the Edison Estate about once every six weeks. The pair share a keen interest in plants.

"He comes to life when he visits the Edison Home, especially when he's in the gardens," Alonzo says. "It brings back all the memories. I mean, through the Edisons, Mr. Halgrim met some of the top botanists in the country and crossed paths with so many other important people. The Edisons had a profound influence on his life."

They made Halgrim a celebrity of sorts.

"For years, he was in the spotlight," Alonzo says. "Once everyone knew him when he visited the Estate. Sure, he misses it."

Collette VanHook, a ticket seller at the Home, says Halgrim is a stranger now to the majority of the 325,000 people who visit the home annually.

"A lot of visitors don't know him, but some do," VanHook said. He loves the recognition. After all, he's one of the roots of this place."

(Editor's Note: Mr. Robert Halgrim and Bob Alonzo are both Honorary members of the Croton Society. Their propagation and identification efforts have encouraged countless enthusiasts over the years. This article is reprinted as a tribute to Mr. Halgrim. *Thank you* Nita Renfroe of Fort Myers for sharing this article.)

## Account Balances Report as of 2/8/00

### Treasurer's Report

As of February 8, 2000, the Croton Society has an operating balance of \$209.51. The beginning balance of our cash accounts contained \$659.51. We still had \$450 in outstanding loans from the purchase of the T-shirts in September.

A full report, to include income and expenditures and an accounting of all club inventory, will be in the next newsletter.

## Survey Results

Thank you to those who responded and returned your 1999 Fall/Winter survey so promptly. The information will undoubtedly be useful in our educational efforts. We will compile and share the information in future newsletters. NOTE: Because of space restrictions, we cannot print every response, but we will try to produce an overview representing the many responses we have gotten.

**Q:** How long have you been collecting Crotons?

A: One year to 50 years and everything in between.

Q: What programs/lectures would you be interested in seeing/attending?

A: Discussion on Crotons, Cordylines, Fern or any related tropicals.

Hybridizing. Croton programs to encourage children's interest.

Airlayering. Taking cuttings. "Field trips" to see other collections.

Q: What was the primary reason you joined the Croton Society?

A: #1 reason: Access to rare and beautiful Crotons. #2: Tour/visit other gardens and collections. #3: Help with identification. #4: Increase my personal collection. #5: Information not otherwise available.

Q: What are your major sources for new Crotons?

A: #1 source: Air layering. #2: Cuttings. #3: Major retail chains. #4: Plant Sales. #5: Swaps.

We'll share more results in the next newsletter! Be sure to send yours in if you haven't already.

## Letter to the Editor

*We will gladly print any letters that you send. We welcome and encourage your feedback.*

Dear Croton Society:

The Croton Society belongs to all of us, the young, the not-so-young and the children. I would like to see some educational programs for the "young children" so they can learn about Crotons. I got this from my daughter, Altira.

From Steve's Croton Patch  
Member Steve Woosley  
Fort Myers, FL

*Editor's Note: Steve, our 10-year old daughter, Lizzy, has been on several cutting outings and field trips with us. You've got the right idea - start them out young and we'll have the next generation Robert Halgrims trained and ready to preserve the plants we all love so!*

## 2000 Calendars

Thank you members Phil Stager and Harold Lee for your fine efforts at putting together our inaugural Croton Society calendar. They look great and will remind us all year of these wonderful plants! If you have not yet received your copy, please contact Harold at P. O. Box 24892, Tampa, FL 33623.

## Did you know...

*Tips from: Steve Woosley, Fort Myers*  
What determines the outcome of pollinated plants? The "hybridizers" are the flowers in the center of your plants, the main center stems. This main stem causes the "true color" when pollinating.

When air layering, what should you never do? Never take the "true color" stems from the parent plant, as the plant may revert back to few or no colors at all.

When should I start air layering? Due to central Florida being the lightning capital of the world, I start June 1<sup>st</sup>.

What is the quickest way to root my cuttings? If you use a root stimulator and mix it with your Croton mix soils, add only 1/4 to 1/2 soil to pot (depending upon the size of the cutting) you can root them in 2 to 3 weeks.

What can I do to help my plants flower? Use a special mix (sugar water and miracle grow).

What's the best way to "weather the weather" through a Fort Myers winter? Add fertilizer to water 2 days before the cold hits. Flood ground and then rinse before sunlight has a chance to damage leaves.

## Club Communications

Where were we before the age of beepers and cellular phones and how did we ever exist before e-mail?

Oftentimes, we send out announcements and notices through e-mail. If you have an e-mail address and would like to receive such info, please send your address to: jgblauman@aol.com. Your name will be added to the list, but will not be given out without your specific permission.

Also, in the interest of member's privacy, we discussed at the October meeting that names and addresses should not be given out. However, the success of this Society depends upon your communicating with other members. If you are interested in contacting a member, contact one of the officers, who will assist you.

## The dry season is upon us...

Actually Florida has been behind on rainfall for a couple of years now, ever since El Nino left town. For example, Central Florida was down about 10" last year and February 2000 is the driest month in ten years. As if that wasn't enough, we are going into our driest time of year. This can spell trouble for those who grow plants native to jungles. In spite of your best efforts, leaves may suddenly fall off your Crotons. When watering, be sure to spray the foliage thoroughly to remove mites & other pests. You won't knock off any leaves that aren't already on their way out. Normally the rains take care of this for us, but we are on our own now.

## Spring is in the air

The end of March marks the end of freezes in central Florida. Those who are addicted to collecting Crotons, this is the time of year to arm ourselves with clippers & venture forth looking for cuttings or start seeking out prime branches for air layering.

In the process we irreparably stain some of our best shirts; an acceptable loss in the scheme of things. While the best time for rooting cuttings quickly is during the peak rainy season of July &

August, there is no reason to wait until then. Think of how many you can have if you start early! The mind boggles at the prospect. Surplus plants can be sold at club sales & meetings, traded or donated. Until every yard in Central & South Florida has Crotons in it, our job is not done.

## Calendar of upcoming events

March 11<sup>th</sup>: CENTRAL FLORIDA PALM SOCIETY MEETING (Tampa)

March 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup>: SELBY BOTANICAL GARDENS SPRING SALE (Sarasota) 941/366-5731

March 18<sup>th</sup>: CROTON SOCIETY MEETING. 1:30 p.m. University of South Florida (Tampa) Botanical Garden Pavilion. 813/974-2329

April 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup>: USF SPRING SALE (Tampa) 813/974-2329

Items for inclusion: If you know of any upcoming horticulture-related events, please submit them to the Upcoming Calendar. We publish quarterly.

## Identifying Crotons

as told by Bob Alonzo to Rick Blauman

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second part in a continuing series of tips and lessons on identifying Crotons. Honorary member, Bob Alonzo has been touted as being the best of the best when it comes to correctly identifying these plants. He has graciously given his time to be interviewed to share his knowledge with fellow Croton Society members. Look for the series in each edition.

### Long, Narrow Leaf with "Shoulders" & Stripes and/or Spots

(This group is originally from the same batch of seeds from Henry Coppinger of Miami. All are frequently encountered, particularly the first two).

**Eleanor Roosevelt** – Has long green leaves with prolific bright yellow spots

throughout. Older leaves may have a reddish tint on the undersides.

**Franklin Roosevelt** – New Growth is green with yellow spots, but soon ages to deep red with pinkish spots. Leaf is typically wider than the others in this group.

**Golden Glow** – Dark green with creamy pink/orange blotches.

**Joanna Coppinger** – Green with irregular yellow/orange/pink mid stripe. Edges have spots of the same colors. Yellow turns to pink with age.

**Yellow Joanna Coppinger** – Green with yellow markings, similar to the above plant, but lacking the other colors.

**Reliance** – A Joanna Coppinger sport that has a narrow mid-stripe of orange/yellow with little if any spotting on the green edges.

## Cycads, Companion Plants For Crotons

by: Tom Broom, Polk City FL

Cycads make great companion plants to grow along with your Crotons, many cycads are fairly tropical plants and are grown in the same areas of the world. For the most part, cycads will be colder hardy than crotons, so they will not need as much protection as crotons if you grow them where freezes are possible. Large cycads can be a main focal point in a landscape, with the crotons planted near by for a colorful accent. Small cycads can be planted amongst larger crotons to fill in areas in the landscape.

Cycads are cone-bearing plants that date back to 250 million years. They are the oldest, living, seed bearing plants on earth. Their closest relatives are the pine trees and other conifers. Cycads are very easy plants to grow. In habitat, they live in areas where the faster growing flowering plants will not overtake them. They can grow in the worst soil conditions in the world.

Usually, they live in pure sand, and sometimes they can be found growing on solid rock. Because of this, they are perfect for growing in sandy Florida soils. One reason why they can survive such conditions is that they have a specialized root system called coralloid roots, that are nitrogen fixing roots which in essence produce fertilizer for the plant naturally.

There are several unusual cycad species that can be grown quite successfully in Florida, but a good supply of these plants for the landscape trade might be several years coming. I am going to discuss five species that will work well in our landscapes, and either have a widespread availability already, or will have in the next few years. These plants are listed in the order of the most available to the least available at this time.

*Dioon edule* is probably top on the list for cold hardiness of all the cycads that grow well in Florida. After the freeze of 1989 my king sago were totally defoliated. My *Dioon edule* plants did not even get tip burn at 17°F. I know of people who have tested this plant down to 10°F. In habitat, these plants grow in sandy areas, and sometimes on rocks over looking the Gulf of Mexico, also showing their great salt tolerance. In fact, they will grow well in almost any kind of soil that drains well. Barring any insect or pathogen damage, these plants will live for 1500 years with no real care at all. *Dioon edule* has the general appearance of the king sago, with lighter green foliage. These plants are available all over the state by wholesale nurseries that carry other more, well known cycads.

*Cycas taitungensis*, commonly known as the Prince Sago, or the Emperor Sago is starting to be widely used in areas where a larger, but cold hardy cycad is needed. The leaf spread of the King Sago will normally be around six feet wide, where the spread on this species will be around eleven feet wide. The foliage has been found to be slightly less frost tolerant compared to the king, but the stems have found to be more cold hardy. People have been growing these plants as a test in Atlanta and in central Alabama. This species is



also very salt tolerant. *Cycas taitungensis* is probably the fastest growing cycad known. If grown in full sun, and fertilized heavily, these plants can push up to six leaf flushes per year. With the right growing conditions, they can grow from a sprouted seed to a plant with a two feet tall stem in less than five years. Availability is very good, with more than 100,000 plants being produced each year in Florida.

*Encephalartos ferox* is a species from South Africa that is getting to be the most sought after, unusual cycad in south Florida. This species has leaflets that resemble the leaves of a Rotunda Holly plant, making it very showy. The best attribute this species has is the bright red cones that are produced on the mature plants. A female cone can be fifteen inches tall, and ten inches wide. A larger plant can produce as many as five female cones at one time. Contrasted with the dark green foliage, these red cones stand out in the landscape. I like to use these with Aztec Grass to add to the contrast of color and texture. *Encephalartos ferox* prefers to grow in a semi-shady area to look the best. The plant can tolerate temperatures down to 18°F, but is not very frost tolerant. If grown in partial shade, it would be protected from these frosts. This species will attain a spread of nine feet in only eight years of proper growing. Supply of this plant is not meeting the demand yet, but there are a dozen nurseries in Florida propagating them from seed.

*Ceratozamia kuesteriana* is a cycad from Mexico that is just now coming into the scene. The foliage is very frost tolerant, and the stems have proved to be cold hardy down to 17°F. This is a subterranean species, so if the stem is planted below ground level, it will tolerate lower temperatures. This is one of only a few species of cycads that are totally unarmed, or in other words there are no spines on these plants. This species would make a good accent plant near walkways where most people would not want to use other cycads. *Ceratozamia kuesteriana* has what cycad collectors call brown emergent leaves. The new soft leaves come out brown and then harden up to a light green. This color change can be very

attractive in the landscape where contrast is needed. A single headed plant will attain a spread of five feet, but multiple heads can be produced to increase the spread to about seven feet over time. This is another plant that would prefer to be in a somewhat shady location to look it's best. Several years ago two or three thousand plants were imported into Florida. There are quite a few people with breeding colonies here in Florida. Somewhere around 10,000 seeds are produced each year in Florida, but this will have to increase if demand for this species grows in the future.

*Ceratozamia hildae*, commonly known as the bamboo cycad, is the most exciting new species of cycad to enter Florida. This plant grows more in a shape similar to bamboo instead of having a fountain form shape like most cycads. The foliage as well as the stem are very cold hardy, and have been tested in Louisiana with very good results during the 1989 freeze. These can be used in smaller areas where sagos would be out of the question. The leaves will attain a height of seven feet, and the leaflets are arranged in clusters that resemble bow ties in appearance. *Ceratozamia hildae* is a fairly fast growing species, and can become mature in only four to five years. This plant looks it's best in partial shade but can be grown in both sun and deep shade. Around 6,000 seeds are produced each year in Florida, but in five years this figure should increase to 50,000. When more people realize how beautiful and versatile this species is, there will be a great demand for public and private use.

I hope this has given you a better understanding of these companion plants, and that you will be able to create a more versatile landscape by using them.

## Florida Favorites

Mortii seems to have waned in popularity, as it is not usually seen in nurseries anymore. At one time it was one of the most commonly planted Crotons in Florida. Perhaps the bright colors and variable leaf shapes of later hybrids have pushed it into the

background. There are many large specimens still to be found in landscapes, as it takes the cold rather well. The leaves are long, narrow and pointed. In good light they are attractive with bright yellow veins that can be irregular and blotchy. Green and yellow Crotons make a nice contrast when planted amongst the more colorful varieties. In an exposed area, Mortii is a logical choice.

Although it isn't offered for sale very often, *Andreanum* is still one of the most commonly found Crotons in Florida yards today. These make large, full shrubs. The leaves are long and fairly wide. The most striking quality is the bold veining. On new growth this is yellow, but then turns to orange and sometimes red. *Andreanum* is ideal for areas where a tall, background Croton is needed, such as along a fence as a background to smaller Crotons hybrids.

Norma is a European cross that is one of the parents of Petra. Norma has much less veining and is predisposed to blotches of wild colors, often-brilliant reds, oranges, and yellows on a dark red/purple background. It makes a bold statement in a landscape and can hold its own alongside many of the less common Croton hybrids.

**OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE**

Please check the committee or committees you will be willing to serve on. The Committee chairperson will contact you for your input. Your ideas **DO** count!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Business Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_ Alternate E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Committees:**

Croton Fiesta  
Membership  
Research

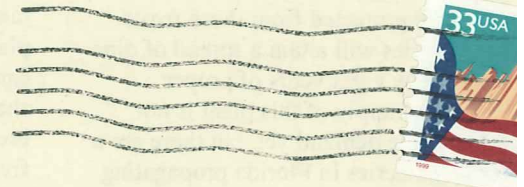
Awards  
Newsletter  
Education

Public Relations  
Plant Show/Sales  
Website development/maintenance

Ideas for any of the above Committees: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return these by March 31<sup>st</sup> to the Croton Society, P. O. Box 24892, Tampa, FL 33623, ATTN: Committees or respond via e-mail to Ron Parlett [Crotonman@prodigy.net]. *Thanks!*

The Croton Society  
**NEWSLETTER**  
P. O. Box 5597  
Sun City Center, FL 33571



ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

*Happy 1<sup>st</sup> Birthday, Croton Society!*



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